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1919

NEW BORZOI POETRY

BODY AND RAIMENT
PROFILES FROM CHINA
By Eunice Tietjens

170 CHINESE POEMS
MORE TRANSLATIONS FROM THE CHINESE
By Arthur Waley

POEMS: FIRST SERIES
By J. C. Squire

THE BELOVED STRANGER
By Witter Bynner

A WOMAN OF THIRTY

BY

MARJORIE ALLEN SEIFFERT

AND

POEMS OF ELIJAH HAY

NEW YORK
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CONTENTS

I. The Old Woman

A Morality Play, 3

II. Love Poems in Summer

Singalese Love Songs I–V, 11
The Silent Pool, 15
Nocturne, 16
Theme Arranged for Organ I–III, 17
The Moonlight Sonata, 19
Possession, 20
Evening: the Taj Mahal, 21
The Gift, 23
The Bridge, 24
A Temple I–VII, 25
Candles, 30
Winter Night, 31
Last Days I–V, 32
Sorrow, 35
Prison, 36
The Dream House, 37

III. Studies and Designs

Design for a Japanese Vase, 41
The Bow Moon (A Print by Hiroshige), 42
An Italian Chest, 44
The Pedlar, 46
Portrait of a Lady in Bed I–V, 48
Portrait of a Gentleman, 53
From the Madison Street Police Station, 54
La Fèlice, 55
The Journey, 57
The Last Illusion, 58
The Desert, 59
The Picnic, 61

IV. Interlude

Mountain Trails I–VII, 67
October Morning, 70
October Afternoon, 71
Maternity, 72
The Father Speaks, 73
To Allen, 74
To Helen, 75
The Immortal, 76
To an Absent Child I–IV, 78
Summer Night, 80
Maura I–VI, 81
November Dusk, 85
Winter Valley I–IV, 86

V. Love Poems in Autumn

Ballad, 91
The Pathway of Black Leaves I–IV, 92
Elegy, 95
Sequence I–X, 96
Disillusion, 103
November Afternoon, 104
Yareth at Solomon's Tomb, 105
Argolis, 106
St. Faith's Eve, 107

Poems of Elijah Hay

The Golden Stag, 111
To Anne Knish, 112
Lolita, 114
Spectrum of Mrs. Q., 115
Epitaph, 116
A Sixpence, 117
Three Spectra, 118
Two Commentaries, 119
A Womanly Woman, 120
Lolita Now Is Old, 121
The Shining Bird, 123
The King Sends Three Cats to Guinevere, 124
Ode in the New Mode, 126
Night, 127

I. The Old Woman

(A Morality Play)

The Old Woman

(A Morality Play)

Characters:
The Woman
The House
The Doctor
The Deacon
The Landlady

Doctor: There is an old woman
Who ought to die —

Deacon: And nobody knows
But what she's dead —

Doctor: The air will be cleaner
When she's gone —

Deacon: But we dare not bury her
Till she's dead —

Landlady: Come, young doctor
From the first floor front,
Come, dusty deacon,

From the fourth floor back,
You take her heels
And I'll take her head —

Doctor and Deacon: We'll carry her
And bury her
If she's dead!

House: They roll her up
In her old, red quilt,
They carry her down
At a horizontal tilt,
She doesn't say "Yes"
And she doesn't say "No,"
She doesn't say, "Gentlemen,
Where do we go?"

Doctor: Out in the lot
Where ash-cans die,
There, old woman,
There shall you lie!

Deacon: Let's hurry away
And never look behind
To see if her eyes
Are dead and blind,
To see if the quilt
Lies over her face —
Perhaps she'll groan
Or move in her place!

House: The room is empty
Where the old woman lay,
And I no longer
Smell like a tomb —

Landlady: Doctor, deacon,
Can you say
Who'll pay rent
For the old woman's room?

* * * * * * *

House: The room is empty
Down the hall,
There are mice in the closet,
Ghosts in the wall —
A pretty little lady
Comes to see —

Woman: Oh, what a dark room,
Not for me!

Landlady: The room is large
And the rent is low,
There's a deacon above
And a doctor below —

Deacon: When the little mice squeak
I shall pray —

Doctor: I'll psycho-analyse
The ghosts away —

Landlady: The bed is large
And the mattress deep,
Wrapped in a feather-bed
You shall sleep —

Woman: But here's the door
Without a key!
An unlocked room
Won't do for me!

Doctor: Here's a bolt —

Deacon: And here's a bar —

Landlady: You'll sleep soundly
Where you are!

Woman: Good night, gentlemen,
It's growing late,
Good night, landlady,
Pray don't wait!
I'm going to bed,
I'll bolt the door
And sleep more soundly
Than ever before!

Deacon: Good night, madam,
I'll steal away —

Doctor: Glad a pretty lady
Has come to stay!

House: She lights a candle —
What do I see!
That cloak looks like
A quilt to me!
She climbs into bed
Where long she's lain,
She's come back home,
She won't leave again.
She's found once more
Her rightful place,
Same old lady
With a pretty new face.
Let the deacon pray
And the doctor talk,
The mice will squeak
And the ghosts will walk.
There's a crafty smile
On the landlady's face,
The old woman's gone,
But she's filled her place!

Landlady: It's nothing to me
If the old woman's dead,
There's somebody sleeping
In every bed!

II. Love Poems in Summer

Singalese Love Songs

I

Your eyes are beautiful beggars,
Careless singing minstrels,
Who will not starve
Nor sleep cold under the sky
If they receive no largess
Of mine.

Once lived a woman
Of great charity —

At last
Her own children
Begged for bread.

II

I would make you love me
That you might possess
Desire —

For to your heart
Beauty is a burned-out torch,

And Faith, a blind pigeon,
Friendship, a curious Persian myth,
And Love, blank emptiness,
Bearing no significance
Nor any reality.

Only Weariness is yours:
I would make you love me
That you might possess
Desire.

III

Is my love
Of flesh or spirit?
I only know to me
Your eyes are wholly you.

Our glances dart
Like the flash of a bird
Gone, before the colour of his wing
Is seen.

I have not bathed my soul
In your eyes,
My soul would drown.

IV

I have starved to know your lips
Yet my soul
Does not die of want.

For only dreams are real,
And fulfilment is an illusion.
There is but one fulfilment,
Blind Nature's way —

My arms reach toward illusion,
And I would carry mist against my heart,
Not the warm, heavy head
Of a sleeping child.

Starving, I hold my dream.

V

What do you seek,
Beloved?

When you have had
All of me
There will remain for you
One beautiful desire the less.

You think you seek my love
But you seek
My denial.

Hunger, Want,
Is the only pain
I would not spare you —
Alas, that too
Will die!

The Silent Pool

Your smile is a heron, flying
Over waters cool,
My thoughts of you are blue Iris!
Today is the silent pool
Which shining heron and Iris blue
Are mirrored on.

Tomorrow
Will still reflect the Iris —
My thoughts of you;
But the heron will be gone.

Nocturne

It is enough
To feel your beauty
With the fingers
Of my heart,

Your beauty, like the starlight,
Filling night so gently, that it dreams
Unwakened.

I should feel your beauty against my face
Though I were blind.

Theme Arranged for Organ

I. Prelude

What would you have of me, my friend, in truth,
A breath of understanding, or a glance
Into your soul's dark places? Can a word
Aid in your brave attempt to smother youth?
Of what avail that trifling circumstance,
In such a tumult could my voice be heard?

Before your bitter need my lips are dumb
So little can I give you. Should I come
To feed a starving Titan with a crumb?

II. Interlude

Alas, I am too foolish or too wise,
Too soon am blinded or I see too far!
How can I follow with expectant feet,
What is the beacon light that holds your eyes,
Can this blind alley lead to any star
And through this dark confusion, what retreat?

For heaven is awed when comets crash to earth,
But we, who grope and question our soul's worth,
Stumbling, awaken only bitter mirth.

III. Postlude

A breath, a glance, a word,— no more, my friend,
This is the sum of what I have to give
Leaving the tale for ever incomplete.
No perfect moment, and no tragic end,
Within your heart those images shall live
And die like footsteps down an empty street.

Yet all the while a stifled instinct saith:
" Spend your soul's vigour to the utmost breath
And let the hounds come baying at the death! "

The Moonlight Sonata

My soul storm-beaten as an ancient pier
Stands forth into the sea; wave on slow wave
Of shining music, luminous and grave,
Lifting against me, pouring through me, here
Find wafts of unforgotten chords, which rise
And droop like clinging sea-weed. You, so white,
So still, so helpless on this fathomless night
Float like a corpse with living, tortured eyes.
Deep waves wash you against me; you impart
No comfort to my spirit, give no sign
Your inarticulate lips can taste the brine
Drowning the secret timbers of my heart.

Possession

I hold you fast, your hurrying breath,
Your wandering feet, your restless heart,
Are mine alone, for only death
You vowed today, can make us part.

Your eager lips, athirst to drain
Life's goblet of its golden wine
Shall drink tonight or thirst in vain —
I hold you fast for you are mine.

And when I search your soul until
I see too deeply and divine
That you can never love me — Still
I hold you fast for you are mine!

Evening: the Taj Mahal

(A Lover Speaks)

Beloved! . . .

India and you
Breathe through my soul tonight,
You in your gown, impossibly white —
I marvel greatly that it fail
To glow and pale
With iridescent light —
How can it hang in silent nun-like folds?
Think of the flaming mystery it holds,
You . . . You . . .

We stand in that wide place
Where love is frozen in marble, spire on spire,
A snow-white nightingale with a heart of fire
Soaring in space.
We gaze, together, into the shining pool
To catch the soul of beauty unaware
Finding only the peaceful body there
Of beauty drowned and still in waters cool.

Burning so luminously in these pure white things
Somehow akin, are palpitating fires,

Intangible, yet visible as spires
Or wings.
And close at hand, an unseen Moslem sings
Blind, haunting chants, which speak
Of mystery, forevermore unguessed.
O shining ones, I seek
No farther, for my soul, content,
Divines the secret of the Taj Mahal and you —
Beauty and desire, possessed
In white tranquillity, in flaming peace,
Find rest.

The Gift

What is this wine you have poured for me?
You have offered up
Your face in its pure transparency
Like a crystal cup
Which trembling fingers slowly lift —
It is faintly masked
With a tremulous smile. You have brought me a gift,
Your love, unasked.

Could you trust my reckless hands so much?
With no vow spoken,
You gave me a goblet, which at a touch
Were utterly broken!
Your smile replied: "Since the glass was filled
It little mattered
Whether the wine were drunk or spilled
Or the goblet shattered."

The Bridge

I walk the bridge of hours from dawn till night
My heart beating so loud in joyous wonder
To know your love, that I can scarcely breathe;
But in the lonely darkness, with affright
I faintly hear, like ominous, distant thunder
The unseen ocean surging close beneath.

Our bridge so frail, eternity so vast!
When we must sink into the deep at last
Heart of my heart, will you still hold me fast?

A Temple

I. DOORWAY

Carven angels
On the portals,
Angels with crowns, and eagles
And golden lions
On the door.

This is why
The alien worshippers went their way,
Why you alone discovered
The gates were open.

You touched the velvet curtains behind them,
They parted to let you pass.

II. WINDOW

I make a window
Of you, belovèd,
Through which the sun colours
The silence.

Even your absences
Are spaces I have filled
With sapphire;

Your denials
Are burning gold,
I have painted your reluctance
Emerald green:

Your silences
Are crimson
On which your words make delicate
Black tracery.

As for me,
My will is the grey lead
Which I have bent to hold the coloured
Panes of you.

III. SPIRE

My wish goes singing upward
Holding a chime of bells
In its heart:

Pigeons know my silent bells,
Winds touch them and wonder.

That they might reach
That high blue —

Till star fingers touch them
Ever so gently —

And drifting clouds
Lay cool cheeks against them —

My wish goes singing upward
Reaching into silence.

IV. PRIEDIEU

Beauty passes
But dust is eternal.
Outside the temple
Beauty dies in the wind.

So when my temple is fallen
And lies in dust,
Where then will be the memory
Of your beauty?

I pray my dust
That it may hold your image
Tomorrow and for ever.

V. FESTIVAL

The belovèd is returning,
Let the bells ring!

I too am a tower
Hung with bronze bells,

I too am a bell
Chiming to the winds,

I too am the wind
Ringing to the hills,

I too am the hills
Singing to the sky.

I too am the sky!
The belovèd is returning,
Let the bells ring!

VI. DUSK

There is no soul too poor to build a temple
Where it may go apart
And worship darkness.

For out of darkness
Images shine . . . and fade . . .

Since now there is no worship nor any music,
Let incense be a curved smile
On lips that remember,
And candles, notes of laughter
In empty dusk.

Above,
A coloured window slowly turns
Black to the night.

Temples have fallen
Before today,
Stones are ever loosening their hold
One on another . . .

You blocks of marble, sleeping in the sun,
Can you remember chiming bells
And incense?

Now there is only silence,
Even the wingèd stones of archways
Sleep in peace.

Candles

Silence is but the golden frame
That holds your face,
My thoughts, like unblown candle-flame
In a holy place
Surround you. From this secret shrine
Somewhere apart
Do you not feel my candles shine
Upon your heart?

Winter Night

The I that does not love you
I have kept hidden away
In the dark.

(I never dreamed
There was a You
That does not love me!)

Tonight they met.

I hear their words
Falling like icicles
Upon me . . .
I am frozen in terror . . .
Have they killed the You
That Loves me?

Belovèd, can you hear me
Through the bitter sound
Of icicles falling?
Can you see me from behind
Your frozen eyes?

Last Days

I

Shall I pretend
These days are just like other days?
One cannot spend
Every day for seven weeks
Saying good-bye.

So when I must
I speak of your departure casually
As though it were a hundred years away;
As Youth is wont to say:
"Sometime we all must die!"

II

We talk of all the happy things we have done,
We pass them in review,
"Do you remember?" is often on our lips.

One by one
We touch our memories and put them all away—
How shall I dare to look at them
When you are gone!

III

There is no beginning to my love
Nor any end —
It is about your head
Like the deep air,
More than your breath can spend.
It is about your heart
Like arms of faith —
Where you go, it is there.

IV

There are no last things to say,
What promise can I make?
You know my love so well.
All that I have is yours to take.
(How will it be, with part of me away,
Must not my soul be changed?)

Shall I stay young for memory's sake?
Shall I be old and grave and grey?
If I might choose, how could I tell!

V

The You I know
I shall not see again,
A stranger will return.

How shall I win the love
Which he has kept apart
With a blurred image which once was I?

I shall not know his heart,
How can I learn?

Sorrow

Sorrow stands in a wide place,
Blind — blind —
Beauty and joy are petals blown
Across her granite face,
They cannot find
Sight or sentience in stone.

Yesterday's beauty and joy lie deep
In sorrow's heart, asleep.

Prison

I close the book — the story has grown dim,
The plot confused; the hero fades
Behind unmeaning words, and over him
The covers close like window shades
On empty windows. The watchful room
Is weary. Dully the green lamp stares
Into the shadows. The coals are dumb,
The clock ticks heavily. The chairs
Wait sullenly for guests who never come.

Suppose I leave this house, suppose my feet
Plodding into the night
Carry me down the empty street
Made hideous with arcs of purple light . . .
Inevitably I must return to bed.
The house is waiting, chairs, and books, and clocks.
I am their prisoner. I have no more chance
Of escape, when all is said,
Than a dying beetle in a box —
And life, and love, — and death — have gone to
France.

The Dream House

I steal across the sodden floor
And dead leaves blow about,
Where once we planned an iron door
To shut the whole world out;

I find the hearth, its fires unlit,
Its ashes cold — Tonight
Only the stars give warmth to it,
Only the moon gives light.

And yonder on our spacious bed
Fashioned for love and sleep
The Autumn goldenrod lies dead,
The maple-leaves lie deep.

III. Studies and Designs

A Japanese Vase

(A Design to be Wrought in Metals)

Five harsh, black birds in shining bronze come crying
Into a silver sky,
Piercing and jubilant is the shape of their flying,
Their beaks are pointed with delight,
Curved sharply with desire,
The passionate direction of their flight,
Clear and high,
Stretches their bodies taut like humming wire.
The cold wind blows into angry patterns the jet-bright
Feathers of their wings,
Their claws curl loosely, safely, about nothingness,
They clasp no things.
Direction and desire they possess
By which in sharp, unswerving flight they hold
Across an iron sea to the golden beach
Whereon lies carrion, their feast. A shore of gold
That birds wrought on a vase can never reach.

The Bow Moon

(A print by Hiroshige)

From the dawn, Také San,
Ungathered star,
Follow me back through night
Till I recapture
Evening.

(The bending hours of darkness
Sway apart like lilies
Before the backward-blowing wind.)

At last,
Bearing in her mysterious bosom
Unravished beauty,
Dark Yesterday rises to view against her silent sky
Irrevocable . . . secret . . .
Confronting the fantastic dream
Of an impossible Tomorrow.

And that frail bridge,
Delicate, immutable,
Which rises higher than the moon,
More everlasting than the fading sky,

Joining What-was-not with What-might-have-been,
That bridge were named " Today "
If I had loved you, Také San,
If you had loved me.

An Italian Chest

(Lorenzo Designs a Bas-Relief)

Lust is the oldest lion of them all
And he shall have first place,
With a malignant growl, satirical,
To curve in foliations prodigal
Round and around his face,
Extending till the echoes interlace
With Pride and Prudence, two cranes, gaunt and tall.

Four lesser lions crouch and malign the cranes,
Cursing and gossiping they shake their manes
While from their long tongues leak
Drops of thin venom as they speak.
The cranes, unmoved, peck grapes and grains
From a huge cornucopia, which rains
A plenteous meal from its antique
Interior (a note quite curiously Greek).

And nine long serpents twist
And twine, twist and twine,
A riotously beautiful design
Whose elements consist
Of eloquent spirals, fair and fine,

Embracing cranes and lions, who exist
Seemingly free, yet tangled in that living vine.

And in this chest shall be
Two cubic meters of space
Enough to hold all memory
Of you and me —
And this shall be the place
Where silence shall embrace
Our bodies, and obliterate the trace
Our souls made on the purity
Of night . . .
Now lock the chest, for we
Are dead, and lose the key!

The Pedlar

Hark, people, to the cry
Of this curious young magician-pedlar
Seeking a golden bowl!

He wanders through the city
Offering useful tin-ware
For all the ancient metal
You have left to rust
In the dim, dusty attic
Or mouldy cellar
Of your soul.

He refuses nothing —
Rusty nails
Which may have played their part
In a crucifixion —
For ten of these he will give
A new tin spoon.

The andirons
Once guarding hearth-fires of content,
Now dusty and forgotten
In an obscure corner,
He will give for these

A new tin tea-kettle
With a wooden handle.

And for this antique bowl
Fashioned to hold
Roses or wine?

The eyes of the pedlar glisten!
O woman, if acid reveal
Gold beneath the tarnished surface
He will gladly give you
His hands, his eyes, his soul,
His young, white body —

If not,
A mocking laugh
And a bright tin sieve
To hold your wine
And roses.

Portrait of a Lady in Bed

I. THE COVERLET

My cowardice
Covers me safely
From everything . . .

From cold, which makes me yield
And quietly die
Beneath the snow;

From heat, which makes me faint
Until cool nothingness receives me;

From hurt, (Seize me, O Lion,
And I shall die of fright
Before I feel your teeth!)

From love,
Yes, most of all from love.

How can love touch me?
Is it not heat,
Or cold,
Or a lion?

My cowardice covers me
Safely
From everything!

II. THE PILLOW

To know you think of me
Sustains my spirit
Through the long night.

(My thought of you
Is wine, banishing sleep!)

Your thoughts of me are feathers,
Light nothings,
Drifting, dancing,
Floating,
Blown by a breath of fancy
Away from your sight.

They would choke me,
They would blind me
With the Nothing I am to you
If I dared see them;
But I bind them into a pillow,
And to know that you think of me
Sustains my spirit
Through the night.

III. SOUVENIR

Harlequin, seeing me gay
You loved me,
For fools need mirth,

O solemn Harlequin!

Tall tragedians make me laugh
Joyously, riotously,
Tall, dark villains, and heroes with blonde hair
Make me laugh uproariously . . .
(I could elope with a tragedian!)

But you with your clowning, Harlequin,
Brought bony truth too near —

Harlequin, I might have loved you
But I could not make you gay!

IV. THE CURTAIN

I do not fear
You, or me, or death,

There now is nothing left to fear
But this,
This curtain of blackness.

Once I feared you,
And all you thought and felt

And all you said and did:
I feared myself,
And all you made me think and feel
And say and do —

Now I no longer fear
Thinking, feeling, saying, doing,
Nor blankness, silence, apathy, torpor —

I do not fear
You, or me, or death —

I only fear
This curtain of blackness
Which is your absence.

V. THE DREAM

Harlequin comes to me, smiling,
Through the white-shining birch trees
Of the twilight wood.

He has forgiven
My cowardice and hesitations,
Soon I shall sink into his arms
With all the imagined fervour
Of a thousand dreams.

Why does he come so slowly?
There is no longer anything
To mar our meeting . . .

This must be real
For Harlequin is still clowning,
He waves his arms grotesquely
To make me smile . . . .

Quick, into his arms
With unspent fervour . . .
Why are the trees all sighing?
Look, whispering birches, if you will,
I and my love embrace!

They do not look,
They do not seem to care . . .

Embrace me, my belovèd!
(Can these by passionate kisses?
They feel so thin and cool
Like mist.)

The birches shiver
As though the night-wind stirred them.

Can we be dead?

Portrait of a Gentleman

Tower of stone
Rugged and lonely,
My thoughts like ivy
Embrace my memory of you,
Climbing riotously, wantonly,
Till the harsh walls
Are clothed in tender green.

Tower of stone,
Stark walls and a narrow door
Which speak:
"You who are not for me
Are against me,—
If you are mine,
Enter!"

But who would be prisoned
In unknown darkness?

Tower of stone
Rugged and lonely,
I dared not enter and I would not go
Till clasping you
My arms were bruised and torn.

From the Madison Street Police Station

I, John Shepherd, vagrant,
Petition the park commissioners
For wider benches.

My soul has long been reconciled
To the prick of gunny-sack,
(O well-remembered woollen fleeces!)
And rustling vests of newspaper,
And the chill of rubbers on unshod feet,
But to the wasteful burning of dry leaves,
God's shepherd's mattress,
Never!

Descendant of ancient ones
Who tended flocks and watched the midnight sky,
My forebears saw the Eastern star appear
Over Judean hills.

Where do your flocks graze, gentlemen?
Are there no sheep or shepherds any more?
All day long I sought the flocks
And came by night to a wide, grassy place,
Where I could sit and watch the stars wheel by —
And in the morning some one brought me here.

La Fèlice

La Fèlice, by the forest pond
looks through leaves to the Western screen
of Chinese gold that lies beyond
black trees and boughs of golden-green.

The little body of La Fèlice
weary of everything on earth
has passed from love to love, till peace
and beauty alone have any worth.

So still and deep the water lies,
so fiery-cool, so yellow-clear;
" Here beauty sleeps! " La Fèlice cries,
" I will give myself to beauty here!"

The mud is smooth and deep, the weeds
beneath her feet are soft and cool,
ripples widen and glistening beads
of bubble rise on the forest pool.

The water reaches to her knee,
now to her thigh, now to her breast,
till like a child all peacefully
does La Fèlice lie down to rest.

She struggles like a fearful bride
with ecstasy — then La Fèlice
turns quietly upon her side
and over the sunset pool is peace.

The Journey

Three women walked through the snow
Beneath an empty sky,
And one was blind, and one was old,
And one was I.

Bravely the Blind One led,
I questioned from behind
" Tell me, where do we go? " She said
" Have courage . . . I am blind! "

We came at last to a cliff,
The Blind One plunged, and was gone —
I looked behind me, stark and stiff
The Old One stood in the dawn.

The deep crevasse was black
Beneath the dawning day,
I could not turn and travel back,
The Old One barred the way.

I could not turn aside,
(To lead, one dare not see)
I think that day I must have died
Such silence is in me.

The Last Illusion

Along the twilight road I met three women,
And they were neither old nor very young;
In her hands each bore what she most cherished,
For they were neither rich, nor very poor.

In the hands of the first woman
I saw white ashes in an urn,
In the hands of the next woman
I saw a tarnished mirror gleam,
In the hands of the last woman
I saw a heavy, jaggèd stone —

Along the twilight road I met three women,
And they were neither fools nor very wise,
For each was troubled lest another covet
Her precious burden — so they walked alone.

The Desert

Through dusty years, and drearily,
Two lovers rode across a desert hill
While patient love followed them wearily
Through the long, sultry day . . .
But when night came, the desert had its way,
Turning, they found love cold and still.

It lay so pitiful a thing,
Threadbare, and soiled, and worn —
"Why have we kept such starveling love?" she cried,
"Was it worth treasuring?"
And he replied:
"Bury it then! I shall not mourn!"

The wind came from the West,
It seemed to blow
Across a million graves to the sordid bier
Where lay their love. She said: "We will bury it here!"
They laid it low,
They rode on, dispossessed.

And all around
Rose silent hills against the darkening sky,

Wave upon motionless wave.
The night wind made a mournful sound.
The woman turned: " It is lonely here!
I am afraid!" she said.
He made reply:
" What is there left to lose or save?
What is there left to fear?
Our hearts are empty. Have we not buried our dead?"
She said, " I fear the empty dark, be kind!"
He said, " I am still here, be comforted!"

Then from its shallow grave
Their love rose up and followed close behind.

The Picnic

Here they come, in pairs, carrying baskets,
Pale clerks with brilliant neckties, and cheap serge suits,
Steering girls by the arm, clerks, too,
Pretty and slim and smart,
Even to yellow kid boots, laced up behind.

They take the electric cars far into the country,
They descend, gaily chattering, at the Amusement Park.
Under the trees they eat the lunch they have carried —
Salad, sausages, sandwiches, candy, warm beer.
They ride in the roller-coaster, two in a seat,
(Glorious danger! Warm, delicious proximity!)
The unaccustomed beer floods their veins like heady wine,
And smothered youth awakens with shrill screams of joy.

The sun sets, and evening is drowned in electric lights;
Arm-in-arm, they wander under the trees
Everywhere meeting others, wandering arm-in-arm
In the same wistful wonder, seeking they know not what.

Two leave the park and the crowds — The stars shine out,
A river runs at their feet, behind them, a leafy copse,
Away on the other shore, the fields of grain
Lie sleeping peacefully in the starlight.
Tonight the world is theirs, a legacy
From those who lived familiar friends with river, field and forest —
Their forebears.

Through the night, the same earth-magic moves them
Which swayed those ancient ones, long-dead —
And these, too, lean and drink,
Drink deeply from the river, the flowing river of life.

Slowly they return to the crowds and the brilliant lights,
Dazzled, they look aside, silently climb on the cars.
They cling to the swaying straps, weary, inert, confused.
The lurching car makes halt — they are thrown in each others' arms —
Alien and unmoved, they sway apart again —
The car moves through the fields and suburbs back to the town.

They leave the car in pairs, the picnic baskets
Rattling dismally, plate and spoon and jar.
The boy takes his girl to her lodgings in awkward silence.

They look askance — " Good-night ! " — the front
door closes,
Indeed their eyes have not met, since by the river
Those wondrous moments
Linked them to earth and night, not to each other.

IV. Interlude

Mountain Trails

(GLACIER PARK, SEPT. '17)

I

Night stands in the valley
Her head
Is bound with stars,
While Dawn, a grey-eyed nun
Steals through the silent trees.
Behind the mountains
Morning shouts and sings
And dances upward.

II

The peaks even today show finger prints
Where God last touched the earth
Before he set it joyously in space
Finding it good.

III

You, slender shining —
You, downward leaping —
Born from silent snow

To drown at last in the blue silent
Mountain lake —
You are not snow or water,
You are only a silver spirit
Singing!

IV

Sharp crags of granite,
Pointing, threatening,
Thrust fiercely up at me;
And near the edge, their menace
Would whirl me down.

V

Climbing desperately toward the heights
I glance in terror behind me
To be deafened — to be shattered —
By a thunderbolt of beauty.

VI

The mountains hold communion;
They are priests, silent and austere,
They have come together
In a secret place
With unbowed heads.

VII

This hidden lake
Is a sapphire cup —
An offering clearer than wine,
Colder than tears.
The mountains hold it toward the sky
In silence.

October Morning

October is brown
In field and row —

Yet goldenrod
And goldenglow,
Purple asters
And ruddy oaks,
Sumach spreading
Crimson cloaks,
Apples red
And pumpkins gold — ?

Perhaps it's gayer
To be old!

October Afternoon

The air is warm and winey-sweet,
Over my head the oak-leaves shine
Like rich Madeira, glossy brown,
Or garnet red, like old Port wine.
Wild grapes are ripening on the hill,
Dead leaves curl thickly at my feet,
Yet not one falls, it is so still.
Crickets are singing in the sun,
And aimlessly grasshoppers leap
From discontent to discontent,
Their days of leaping nearly done.
There's a rich quietness of earth
That holds no promise any more,
And like a cup, Today is filled
With the last wine the year shall pour.

Maternity

Sturdy is earth,
Dull and mighty,
Unresentful —
Of her own fertility
Covering scars
With healing green.

You cannot anger earth,
You cannot cause her pain
Nor make her remember
Your hungry, querulous love.

At last your unwilling body
She tranquilly receives
And turns it to her uses.

The Father Speaks

My little son, when you were born
    There died a being, sweet and wild,
    A lovely, careless, radiant child,
A passionate woman — her I mourn.

And in her place has come another,
    With troubled smile and brooding eyes,
    Insatiate of sacrifice
And wholly, utterly your mother.

To Allen

Beauty, the dream that I have dreamed so much
Comes true in your quick smile,
And on your cheek I see her touch
And sometimes in your eyes a while
Immortal beauty's fleeting image lies.
Dear child, in whose veins beat
The marching centuries of lovers' feet,
All those brave, ardent ghosts in you arise —
The souls who, loving beauty, gave you birth,
With a chain of passion binding beauty to earth,
A captured dream — these souls breathe with your
breath
Living again in beauty that knows no death.

To Helen

Lie still in my arms, little four-years-old,
Little bud that glows
With more beauty and passion than it can hold,
Little flaming rose,

The spring's red blossoms, when winter lies deep
On a wind-swept world
Of tossing branches, lie safely asleep
In brown buds curled.

They wake — and the wind strips their petals away
And spills them afar —
Can I keep you from blooming, whatever I say,
Wild bud that you are!

The Immortal

Child of a love denied, a dream unborn,
Spirit more brave
Than passion's unfulfilment, wiser than fate —
Nor breast nor grave
As cradle you have known,—
I mourn
That my soul knows its own
Too late!

A soul's half-breath,
Passion's unremembered dream,
Perfume without a vase,
Intangible you seem
To life or death.

And when the coloured mantle of the days
Slips from my shoulders, and I lie
Forgetful, dumb,
Mingled with earth in passionless embrace,
Will you, forgotten as a bird,
Singing unheard
In space,
Will you not come
When every other dream is gone,

Bringing to that silent place
The shadow of a gesture flung
By motionless hands, a floating echo hung
From an unspoken word,
And to the empty sky
The sunset of a day which did not dawn
And cannot die!

To an Absent Child

I

At first in dreams
I pressed you so close
That you melted away on my breast,
But now I wait, breathless and motionless,
Till I feel your slender arms caress me
Like swallows blown against me
And quickly flown.

II

Small flower,
My body is the earth from which you sprang,
But we are more to each other than earth and flower,
Closer, even, than earth and flower,
For the sky in me is one with the sky in you . . .

My love for you
Is like sunlight shining in a quiet place,
You shall feel my love like soft light
Pouring about you.

III

I will not kiss you,
For my kisses are a chain without an end;
Nor take you in my arms,
My arms would smother you against my breast;
I will not even touch your shining head —
But lift your eyes up, flower-face,
And I will fill them as full of love
As they can hold!

IV

Ah no! If you were here
I would sweep you into my arms and hold you close!
Though my love is of the spirit
I must feel your little restless body
Pressed for a moment against my heart.

Summer Night

Rain, rain murmuring endless complaints
In mournful whisperings that never cease,
You bring my tired brain a certain peace
Like Latin prayers to absent-minded saints.

And whether silently to earth you fall,
Or dashed and driven in tempestuous flight
Like souls before God's wrath, the thirsty night,
The soft and fecund earth shall drink you all.

Maura

I

Maura dreams unwakened —
The warm winds touch the bands
That hold her hair.
The call of a silver horn floats by,
A lover tosses flowers into her hands.

Maura dreams unwakened —
She joins the maidens in their dance,
Her limbs follow slow rhythms,
A lover leads her into the shade,
She moves as in a trance.

II

What dim confusion
Troubles her dream,
What passionate caress
Disturbs her spirit's rapt seclusion?

Earth draws her close. How warm
Is lover-earth! Like a sleeping bird
She gives herself, then suddenly
She is a leaf whirled in the storm.

Somewhere in a quiet room, her soul unstirred,
Dead . . . or sleeping,
Through the blind tumult hears afar

The note of a horn, like a silver thread.
She has given her soul to an echo's keeping.

III

Who knows the mountain where the hunter rides
Winding his horn?
Maura who heard it in her dream
Wakens forlorn,
Too late to catch the tenuous thread
Of silver sound
Which in the troubled, intricate fugue of earth
Is drowned.

IV

Maura cannot follow over the hill,
Her youth is landlocked as a hidden pool
Where thirsty love drinks deep,
A shining pool, where lingers
The colour of an unseen golden sky,
A pool where echoes fall asleep.

But restless fingers
Trouble the waters cool,
Snatch at reflected beauty, and destroy
The mirrored dream. The pool is never still,
And broken echoes die.

V

The silver call has gone, but there is left to her
The gentleness of earth,
The simple mysteries of sleep and death,
Of love and birth.
There are faces hungry for smiles, and starving fingers
Reaching for dreams.

And like a memory are the wind-swept chords of night,
And the wide melody of evening sky
Where gleams
A colour like the echo of a horn.
There is a far hill where winds die,
And over the hill lies music yet unborn.

VI

Maura lies dead at last,
The body she gave to child and lover
Now feeds flower and tree.

Earth's arms are wide to her. What breast
Offers such gentle sleeping?
Her limbs lie peacefully.

From the dark West
There comes a note like the echoing cry
Of one who rides through the dusk alone
After the hunt sweeps by.

It fades — the night wind is forlorn —
Music is still,
But Maura has followed the silver horn
Over the distant hill,
Over the hill where all winds die.

November Dusk

Where like ghosts of verdant days
Whispering down,
Leaves in the November dusk
Drift and drown,

Stand two lovers, motionless
And apart
In their sturdy nakedness
Of the heart,

Two dark figures, side by side
Through the mist
Standing as though time had died
Since they kissed,

Whose deep roots, alive and sound
Blindly reach
Mingling in the fertile ground
Each with each —

Pray that we, when gaunt and old
Like bare trees
Through our common earth may hold
Close, like these!

Winter Valley

I

Grey grasses drown
In thin brown water
Wound like a chain on the valley's
Sunken breast.

Fallen leaves on the stream
Float motionless — rest —
So secretly the pale
Water winds around
Toward hidden pools,

Or sinking in the earth
Is drowned.

II

Curved crimson stems,
Thorny fingers of vine,
Reach toward the wind.

Sunlight, thin and cold,
Touches them — they shine.

Nothing passes for thorns to hold —
Red thorns,
Catching at shadows of the wind.

III

Silence in the valley,
Silence without wings —

Like the caught breath
Of an unspoken word
When no words come.

Withered reeds, and thin brown water
Above the reeds
Are dumb.

IV

For what are you waiting, winter valley,
Withered valley, brown with reeds?
You are hushed with waiting.

You are old with secrets,
You are tranquil with forgetting.

You are harsh with thorns
Of fruits long vanished.

V. Love Poems in Autumn

Ballad

Follow, follow me into the South,
And if you are brave and wise
I'll buy you laughter for your mouth,
Sorrow for your eyes.

I'll buy you laughter, wild and sweet,
And sorrow, grey and still,
But you must follow with willing feet
Over the farthest hill.

Follow, follow me into the South,
You may return tomorrow
Wearing my kisses on your mouth,
In your eyes my sorrow.

The Pathway of Black Leaves

I. THE TURNING

The pathway opened before her eyes
Between black leaves —
She laughed, and shivered, and turned aside
From the dusty road.

Her feet moved on like heart-beats,
She could not stop them;
Relentlessly each step fulfilled itself
And the steps behind it —
A hidden chain, drawing her onward
Captive.

And yet she said: "Now I walk free
At last!"

II. TOLL-GATE

The sign read:

"Paupers may pass untaxed,
The Rich shall pay a penny,
The Poor
Must give all they possess."

She emptied her pockets bravely and passed through . . .
They gave her a golden coin in return for her silver,
Bearing on one side the head of a king,
And on the other a worn inscription
Curved like a wreath
And written in a tongue she did not know.

III. THE INN

There was the inn, beside the path,
Standing like the words of an ancient prophet
Forgotten long, now suddenly come true.

> "They who break bread here
> Shall not eat for hunger;
> They who lie here
> Shall not sleep."

All night long the black leaves, one by one,
Laughed, and shivered, and fell into darkness.

IV. RETURN

She has come home
To the house she knew:
But she has forgotten
The square oaken smile of the door.

The room is a stranger,
The fire is sullen;

On her hair a black leaf shines
And clings where it fell.

Against her heart
She has hidden away
The bitter golden profile of a king.

Elegy

I would be autumn earth, and hold
Your beautiful body, slain,
Where, lying still and cold,
Only the winter rain
Shall touch your limbs and face;
Where the white frost shall wed
Your body to black mould
In the close, passionless embrace
Of that dark marriage bed:
I would be autumn earth, and hold
Your beautiful body, dead.

Sequence

I. ARRIVAL

Shining highways
Sing to your step,
Windows beckon,
Doorways open a square embrace.

Doors laugh gently
Swinging together
Behind you.

II. THE TOWER

There's a flag on my tower,
And my windows
Are orange to the night.
They are set in grey stone that frowns
At the black wind.

Inside, there's a guest at my hearth,
And a fire
Painting the grey stone gold.
My windows are black
With the hungry night peering through them.

Blackness lurks in corners,
Wind snatches the sparks,
Tongs and poker jangle together
Like the iron bones
Of a man that was hanged.

III. THEY WHO DANCE

The feet of dancers
Shine with mirth,
Their hearts are vibrant as bells:

The air flows by them
Divided like water
Cut by a gleaming ship.

Triumphantly their bodies sing,
Their eyes are blind
With music.

They move through threatening ghosts
Feeling them cool as mist
On their brows.

They who dance
Find infinite golden floors
Beneath their feet.

IV. PIANISSIMO

I took Night
Into my arms,
Night lay upon my breast.

If night had wings
She would have brought me
Stars for my hair.

The stars laughed
Lightly
From far away.

About my shoulders
White mist curled.

V. PORTRAIT BY ZULOAGA

Death lies in wait
For those who do not know
What they desire,
And Hell for those
Who fear what they have taken.

These hands are wrinkled
From stretching forth,
Brown
From the winds blowing upon them.

They are strong with seizing,
They do not tremble.

VI. GESTURES

Let there be dancing figures
On our wine-flask,
Swastikas on our rug,
Inscriptions in our rings
And on our dwelling.

Let us build ritual
For our worship,
Pledge our love
With vows and holy promises.

If oaths are broken,
Let it be darkly
With threatening gestures.

Thus we ignore
That we love and die
Like insects.

VII. VEILS

I shall punish your blindness
With a veil.

I shall choose words that join
Gaily word to word,
I shall weave them flauntingly
Into veil upon veil,

I shall wind them defiantly
Over my lips, over my eyes.

You shall not see your name
On my lips,
You shall not see your image
In my eyes!

And through my veils I shall not see
That you are blind.

VIII. FREEDOM

I would be free
From two old superstitions,
Thanks and Forgiveness.

So I would think of you
As Flame,
As Wind,
As Night,

To whom I have been
Wind,
And Flame
And Night,

Together burned and swept,
Now smothered
In separate darkness.

IX. MUD

I am dazed and weary
From the shapelessness
Of what I am —

I am poured
Among haphazard stones
In meaningless patterns.

Yesterday's sun dried me
Between rounded cobbles,
Today's deluge sweeps me
Toward alien pavements,
Tomorrow's sun shall dry me
In a new design.

Better the turbid gutter
Toward the open sea!

X. FOOLS SAY —

November's breath
Is black in the branches of trees
And under the bushes,

Harsh rain
Whips down the rustling dance
Of leaves.

There is smoke
In the throat of the wind,
Its teeth
Bite away beauty.

Let fools say:
" Spring
Will come again! "

Disillusion

I touch joy and it crumbles under my fingers —
The dust from it rises and fills the world,
It blinds my eyes — I cannot see the sun.
A choking fog of dust shuts me apart.

I remember the sparkling wind on a bright autumn morning,
I let down my hair and danced in the golden gale,
Then chased the wind as the wind chased fallen leaves —
Wind cannot be caught and tamed like a bird.

I touch joy and it crumbles to dust in my fingers.

November Afternoon

Upon our heads
The oak leaves fall
Like silent benedictions
Closing Autumn's gorgeous ritual,
And we, upborne by worship,
Lift our eyes to the altar of distant hills.

Belovèd
How can I know
What gods are yours,
How can I guess the visions of your spirit,
Or hear
The silent prayers your heart has said?

Only by this I feel
Your gods akin to mine,
That when our lips have met
On this last golden Autumn afternoon
They have confessed in silence
Our kisses were less precious than our dreams.

Today, our passion drowned in beauty,
We turn away our faces toward the hills
Where purple haze, old incense,
Spreads its veil.

Yareth at Solomon's Tomb

At last
Your search is at an end,
King Solomon,

You, restless dreamer,
For whom each face held promise
Unfulfilled,
Whose hungry arms held many women,
(Though none could fill your need)
Who seized, but never loved,
This is your sepulchre . . .

I who till today
Questioned my heart
Now find it buried with you
In this tomb;

So now I can forgive you
That you never believed
My love!

Argolis

Like sun on grasses
Warming to life
Quaint beetles, curious weeds,
Till earth awakens, pregnant beneath its rays —
So came the shepherds down to Argolis.

As nameless trees
Cast cloud-grey shadows there
On moon-pale, tarnished snow,
Till snow and shadow are lost,
Alike confused and forgotten
Among the withered reeds —
So lies their memory across its heart.

St. Faith's Eve

We stood together on a balcony
An hour when the night
Died into blankness,
And light mist
Curling beneath us, hid the earth,
And the cold, unburied stars
Drew further into space . . .

I turned to meet your eyes
And saw
Like a light, rosy veil
Your flesh sink gently down
Leaving only the simple skeleton
And a white voice which said:
"This still is I,
Do you love me
Now?"

Quietly, and without sadness
I looked upon you,
For comfort blindly reached my soul
And primitive beauty.
Without passion, without fervour,
I spoke at last:

" Somehow Faith
Shines from your empty eye-holes,
And Truth
Speaks mutely from your fleshless jaws.
I choose your skeleton to lie with
In the peaceful bed of earth
Through all the dreamless, mornless, utter night! "

Poems of Elijah Hay

The Golden Stag

O hungry hearted ones, sharp-limbed, keen-eyed,
Let me have place!
I too would ride
On your fantastic chase.

Your hunger is a silver hunting horn,
I heard it sweep
The frozen, peaceful morn:
Its note bit me from sleep.

I will ride with you, hunters, even I,
Toward a far hill
To see the golden stag against the sky
Uncaptured still.

To Anne Knish

Madam, you intrigue me!

I have come this far
Cautiously sneezing
Along the dusty highroad of convention,
But now it leads no farther toward you.

Today
I have reached the cross roads —
A weather-beaten sign-board
Blazons undecipherable wisdom
Of which the arrow-heads, even,
Have been effaced.

Eastward, it leads through cultivated fields
Of intellectual fodder,
Where well-fed cattle, herding together,
Browse content:
Are you of these?

Westward, is a lane, hedge-bordered,
Shady, and of gentle indirection,
In May, a bower of sentimental bloom,
But this November weather

Betrays its destiny, the poultry yard
Where geese foregather.

And there ahead, the ancient, swampy way
Modernized by a feeble plank or two:
But the morass of passion lures me not!
I see a vision of two plunging feet,
Discreetly shod, yet struggling in vain —
Slime
Creeps ankle-high, knee-high, thigh-high,
Till all is swallowed save a brave silk hat
Floating alone, a symbol of the creed
I perished shedding.

Yet somewhere you
Intelligent of my distress
Smile, undisturbed —
I have no pedlar's license to submit,
No wares to cry, nor any gift to bring —
I do not know
Anything new —
In truth, then, what have I to do with you?

Yet, madam, you intrigue me!

Lolita

How curious to find in you, Lolita,
The geisha
Who sits and strums in the immortal
Attitude of submission.
There is a ledger in place of her soul!

Your shoulders sang
For admiration,
Your hair wept for kisses,
Your voice curved softly, a caress —
You came among us as a suppliant,
What had we you desired?

Bringing to market stolen goods,
Holding to view used charms,
Behold a hawker's spirit!

Eagles perch proudly
In isolation,
They swoop to seize a living prey —
Crows hover to feed,
Waiting with patience till the soul is fled
Leaving a helpless body — carrion —
(Vile thoughts obsess me!)

What did you want, Lolita?

Spectrum of Mrs. Q.

Fear not, beautiful lady,
That I shall ravish you!
Your arms are languorous lilies —
There is not a thorn
In all your slender greenness,
And you are sweet to madden buzzing bees!

Fear not, beautiful lady,
A hard, black cricket
Inspects you.

Epitaph

Courage is a sword,
Honour, but a shield . . .
Here lies a turtle.

A Sixpence

OBVERSE

If I loved you,
You would rear
Eight healthy children
To our love,
(Forgetting me)
And be happy.

REVERSE

But I do not love you,
So you will write
Eight hundred poems
To our love,
(Forgetting me)
And be happy!

Three Spectra

Of Mrs. X.

You —
Too well fed for rebellion,
Too lazy for self-respect, too timid for murder,
Disgracefully steal the trade-mark of the fairy-tale —
"And they lived together happily
Ever after!"

Of Mrs. Z.

Madam, you are ever retreating,
But are never
Gone —
Some day I shall pursue you
Hoping to see you
Vanish.

Of Mrs. Andsoforth.

Old ladies, bless their hearts,
Are contented as house-flies
Dozing against the wall.
But you,
Imprisoned in the forties,
Delirious, frenzied, helpless,
Are a fly, drowning in a cocktail!

Two Commentaries

1. TO AN ACTOR

You are a gilded card-case
Which I took for a purse.
Your spirit's coin was squandered long ago,
And in its place
Are white cards, all alike,
Bearing a word,
A name,
Connoting nothing.

2. PHILOSOPHER TO ARTIST

You are a raisin, but I am a nut!
What meat there is to you
Can be seen at a glance —
(Seeds, when they exist, are bitter)
My calm, round glossiness,
(For I am sound and free
From wormy restlessness of spirit)
Defies your casual inspection.

It takes sharp teeth
And some determination
To taste my kernel!

A Womanly Woman

You sit, a snug, warm kitten
Blinking through the window
At a storm-haunted world —

Sleet wind caterwauls
Through icy trees,
Which clack their hands at you
Tauntingly.

Why should you leave
Radiator and rubber-plant?
Do people stand at attention to mourn a hero
When they behold
A frozen kitten
In a gutter?

Lolita Now Is Old

Lolita now is old,
She sits in the park, watching the young men pass
And huddles her shawl against the cold.

One night last summer when the moon was red,
Lolita, hearing an old song sung
And amorous laughter down the street
Left her bed —
Lolita thought she was young.

With ancient finery on her back,
A lace mantilla hiding her grey head,
She crept into the warm and alien night.

Her trembling knees remembered the languid pace
Of beauty on adventure bent — her fan
Waved challenges with unforgotten grace.
Cunningly she played her part
For to her peering age
Love was a well-remembered art.

Footsteps followed her — footsteps drew near!
She dropped a rose — hush, he is here!
There came hard arms and a panting kiss —

He felt the fraud of those withered lips,
He cursed and spat —" Was it for this,
You came, old woman, to the park? "
Lolita gathered skirts and fled
Through the dim dark.

Lolita huddles her shawl against the cold,
She sits and mumbles by the fire. In truth
Lolita knows she is old.

The Shining Bird

A bird is three things:
Feathers, flight and song,
And feathers are the least of these.

At last I hold her in my hands
The shining bird whose flight along
The perilous rim of trees
Has made my days adventurous, my spirit strong.

And now her wings
Are still — her vivid song
But ceaseless twitterings.

Her words are feathers, falling
Lightly, relentlessly, and without rest,
Revealing to my face
Her pinched and starveling breast
Like poultry, dead and unashamed
And naked in the market place.

A shattered flash of wings,
A broken song,
Echo and shine along the rim of trees.

The King Sends Three Cats to Guinevere

Queen Guinevere,
Three sleek and silent cats
Bring you gifts from me.

The first is a grey one,
(I wanted a white one,
I could not find one snowy white enough,
Queen Guinevere,)
He brings you purple grapes.

The second is a grey one,
(I wanted a sleek one,
Where could I find one sleek enough,
Queen Guinevere?)
He brings you a red apple.

The third one, too, is grey.
(I wanted a black one,
Not Hate itself could find one black enough,
Queen Guinevere,)
He brings you poison toadstools.

I send you three grey cats with gifts —
(For uniformity of metaphor,

Since Bacchus, Satan, and the Hangman
Are not contemporaneous in my mythology)
I send you three grey cats with gifts,
Queen Guinevere,
To warn you, sleekly, silently
To pay the forfeit.

Ode in the New Mode

Your face
Was a temple
From which your soul
Came to me beneath arched brows:
And my soul knelt at your feet.

Then
Inadvertently
I saw your leg
Curved and turned like a bird-song,
Dying into esctatic silence at the garter . . .

Wretched
Women!
When you are wholly lovely
Man cannot forget either of his two afflictions,
Soul, or body!

Night

I opened the door
And night stared at me like a fool,
Heavy dull night, clouded and safe —
I turned again toward the uncertainties
Of life withindoors.

Once night was a lion,
No, years ago, night was a python
Weaving designs against space
With undulations of his being —
Night was a siren once.

O sodden, middle-aged night!

THE END

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